

**Remarks/Arguments**

Claims 1-20 are pending in the application. Independent claims 1, 9, and 15 have been amended. Dependent claims 3, 12, and 18 have been canceled. No new matter has been introduced. Reconsideration and allowance of claims 1-2, 4-11, 13-17, and 19-20 is respectfully requested.

**Preliminary amendment of claims 1, 9, and 15:**

Applicant has amended independent claim 1 to incorporate limitations from dependent claim 3 reciting that the two driven endless aligning conveyors are "constructed from a plurality of substantially form-retaining segments which are fixed to an endless support member". Independent method claim 9 has been amended to incorporate the limitation of dependent claim 12 reciting that the "aligning conveyors are displaced at different speeds during processing step b)". Likewise, independent apparatus claim 15 has been amended to incorporate limitations from dependent claim 18 to recite "means for displacing the aligning conveyors at different speeds during step b)".

Applicant submits that no such structure or steps can be found in the relevant prior art. Specifically, in regard to claim 1, the downwardly converging inclined surfaces of the aligning conveyors being constructed from a plurality of substantially formed-retaining segments provides the advantage of total freedom in the shape of the segments forming the contact surfaces. This freedom in designing the segments forming the conveyor chute simplifies the construction of the aligning conveyors, and also increases the freedom of design of the shape of the transport path defined by the aligning conveyors. Accordingly, it can be seen that the present invention as recited in independent claim 1, provides a structural distinction with a functional advantage over the prior art.

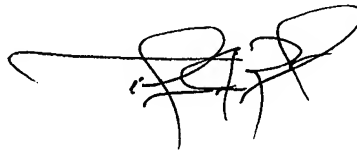
Independent claims 9 and 15 provide for the aligning conveyors being displaced at different speeds during processing, which provides the advantage of the meat products taking on the desired axially orientation owing to the difference in speed. Accordingly, independent claim 9 and 15 provide a structural distinction with a functional advantage over the prior art.

**Conclusion:**

In view of the above amendments and remarks, Applicant believes that claims 1-2, 4-11, 13-17, and 19-20 are in condition for allowance, and Applicant respectfully requests allowance of such claims. If any issues remain that may be expeditiously addressed in a telephone interview, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned at 515-558-0200.

Any fees or extensions of time believed to be due in connection with this amendment are enclosed with this amendment; however, consider this a request for any extension inadvertently omitted, and charge any additional fees to Deposit Account No. 50-2098.

Respectfully submitted,



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